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DEFENSE SUPPORT TO PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: OPTIONS FOR THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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04 May 2009

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Abstract

Defense Support to Public Diplomacy: Options for the Operational Commander:

With the end of the Cold War came a uni-polar world in which the United States stood alone as the sole super power. One of the major fallouts of the perceived peace dividend created by the new world order was the thought that the U.S. government no longer needed to actively communicate with the nations of the world. The primary agency tasked with communicating outside the United States, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) was gutted primarily for short sighted fiscal reasons. Communicating globally with friends, foes, allies, and adversaries is as important today as it was in the Cold War. Unfortunately, the coordination and synergy needed for effective public diplomacy has still not been given the necessary priority and resources to be fully effective. On 06 November 2008, the Government Accounting Office issued a press release listing thirteen "Urgent Issues" for the next President and Congress. Number 5 on that list is improving the United States' image abroad through public diplomacy and broadcasting. Operating under one central information strategy and theme across the different geographic commands and government agencies will ensure that U.S. policies display images of security, collaborative progress, and hope to the world.

INTRODUCTION

In the global war on terrorism, adversaries and allies utilize all elements of power in order to gain key terrain. It is easy to measure how the tangible affects of hard power, such as economic sanctions and military actions, diminish your enemy. However, focusing solely on these elements of national power will only continue to frustrate leaders because of the intangible effects caused by these capabilities. An alternative to this is the use of "soft power" in order to gain crucial key terrain. In the current and future global conflicts the key terrain is the populace itself. The next jihadist, suicide bomber, trainee for the national military, or informant will be produced based on the ideas portrayed by the two sides. On a daily basis and in every corner of the globe, the "battle of ideas" is waged in order to influence the will and support of the civil populaces. The enabling element of this fight is effective public diplomacy on the part of ourselves, our adversaries, and our allies. In the current environment where information is transmitted instantaneously worldwide in hundreds of different languages through a myriad of mediums, such as satellite television, radios, internet, and word of mouth, it is critical to harness the soft power of information to protect and promote national interests.

Public diplomacy is one of the national instruments of strategic communication employed to implement the U.S. National Security Strategy and allow for leaders to harness critical support. By winning over the hearts and minds of individuals within a state, public diplomacy can help the operational commanders move a state toward more stable forms of government. Understanding the basis of soft power, defense support for public diplomacy, and strategic communication, geographic combatant commanders can effectively coordinate efforts throughout their areas of responsibility. Additionally, geographic combatant

commanders have to ensure that operational messages are coordinated with the information efforts of allies, friends, and former adversaries. It also requires multi-agency, multi-service, multidisciplinary, and multidimensional integration as well as orchestration and synergy. Operating under one central information strategy and theme across the different geographic commands and government agencies will ensure that U.S. policies display images of security, collaborative progress, and hope to the world. Unfortunately, the coordination and synergy needed for effective public diplomacy has still not been given the necessary priority and resources to be fully effective. On 06 November 2008, the Government Accounting Office issued a press release listing thirteen "Urgent Issues" for the next President and Congress. Number 5 on that list is improving the United States' image abroad through public diplomacy and broadcasting.[1] With the end of the Cold War came a uni-polar world in which the United States stood alone as the sole super power. One of the major fallouts of the perceived peace dividend created by the new world order was the thought that the U.S. government no longer needed to actively communicate with the nations of the world. The primary agency tasked with communicating outside the United States, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) was gutted primarily for short sighted fiscal reasons. Communicating globally with friends, foes, allies, and adversaries is as important today as it was in the Cold War. Geographic combatant commanders conduct this communication through military information operations (IO). Joint Publication 3-13 lists core functions of IO include PSYOPS, Military Deception, OPSEC, Electronic Warfare, and Computer Network Operations.[2] A key capability of IO available to geographic combatant commanders is defense support to public diplomacy.

SOFT POWER AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

When one thinks of sovereign state power, the first thought is likely that of military capabilities. But the sovereign state has many instruments of power available to it, including diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) instruments. Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Joseph Nye, provides some useful observations on power and its relationship to the sovereign state. In *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Nye says that power is "the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes you want."[3] He goes on to state that influence can be accomplished through forceful means, or hard power, such as military action or economic restrictions. Nye then describes an alternate source of sovereign state influence: soft power. He explains that soft power uses attraction to "get the outcomes you want without the tangible threats or payoffs."[4]

According to Nye, a state derives its soft power from three sources: culture, political values, and foreign policy. The strength of the state's soft power depends on the attraction or repulsion its culture, political values, and foreign policy generate in the citizens of the targeted country. To make soft power work effectively, a state must carefully select the methods that will attract others to its interests. In no way can soft power be an exclusive replacement for hard power. Rather, it can strengthen applications of hard power, and it may be less expensive. Soft power can be directed at either an opposing state or at its individual citizens.

Public diplomacy is one form of soft power employed by the United States. The nation used it during the Cold War to communicate American values to the populations of Communist countries (and to neutral countries and allied populations as well). Public

diplomacy focuses more on the ability to influence public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond that of traditional diplomacy. Public diplomacy focuses on the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the processes of inter-cultural communications.[5]

The U.S. Department of State (DOS) Dictionary of International Relations Terms states that "public diplomacy refers to government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries; its chief instruments are publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio and television."[6] DOS does, in fact, use a variety of media in its efforts to convey U.S. national values to foreign publics. They include information exchanges, English language education programs, student exchange programs, collaboration with indigenous or nongovernmental organizations, and radio and television. Large portions of Africa, Asia, and South America are still lacking basic infrastructure amenities such as land line communication devices to get information from the rest of the world. The reliance of cell phones, text messages, and the internet is how much of those areas communicate with the outside world. DOS has embraced the newer media, such as the internet and satellite broadcasting, in order to become effective tools for employing soft power to remote areas.

Public diplomacy is one of the national instruments of power employed to implement the U.S. National Security Strategy. By winning over the hearts and minds of individuals within a state, public diplomacy can help the U.S. Government move a state toward more stable forms of government. If the United States can successfully use public diplomacy for this

purpose, then it achieves one of the National Security Strategy objectives: to "expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy."[7]

Central to an effective public diplomacy effort is a clear understanding of the scope of public diplomacy and its relationship to kindred disciplines. The most commonly invoked terms bearing on the central meaning of public diplomacy are "information" and "communications." Information and communications are usually conducted through many channels. These include statecraft, public affairs, public diplomacy, military information operations, and other activities, reinforced by political, economic, military, and other actions, to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives. A common name for these skills is strategic communication. Often, the "strategic" portion of the statement creates a belief that the communication direction and creation comes from only the highest level of U.S. government. However, decisions and situations on the tactical level can very quickly equate to strategic policy decisions.

In a December 2007 memo to the Secretary of Defense, Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, "I have grown increasingly concerned about the military's fixation on strategic communication. We get hung up on that word, *strategic*. If we've learned nothing else in this war, it should be that the lines between the strategic, operational, and tactical are blurred almost beyond distinction. This is particularly true in the field of communications, where videos and images plastered on the Web – or even the *idea* of them being so posted – can and often do drive national security decision making. With the aggressive use of technology, the tactical becomes the strategic in the blink of an eye."[8]

The primary avenues that the geographic combatant commanders utilize to communicate with target audiences are the IO capabilities of PA and DSPD. Public affairs are mainly concerned with domestic audiences, and sees maintaining a good press relationship for its organization and leaders as its highest priority. Therefore, the care and feeding of the domestic media tends to preoccupy most of its time and it rarely seeks to shape the news in any sustained way, given the sensitivity of the media to anything perceived as attempted manipulation. This does not preclude that fact that key individuals and public affairs personnel will certainly cultivate and favor individual reporters and seek to shape their coverage of stories on a day-to-day basis (sometimes through the release or leak of privileged information).[9] On the other hand, public diplomacy deals exclusively with international audiences. It too is concerned with breaking news and media coverage, with a focus on the foreign rather than the domestic press. In theory, it is interested more in the strategic impact of the news on foreign audiences than in providing news for its own sake. Public diplomacy is therefore willing to tailor its news coverage in some measure to the interests, needs, and limitations of its diverse audiences. It addition, it provides various kinds of thematic programming designed for a longer term or strategic effect.[10]

Diplomacy, whether carried out publicly or in private, involves not only words, but actions designed not simply to inform or communicate but to have certain measurable political effects. Public diplomacy is also referred to as "political action" when it is specifically targeted at political groups, business leaders, or religious leaders.[11]

Public diplomacy is most often identified with its information component. This is mainly the face-to-face interaction and the building of relationships through exchange programs. Public diplomacy is said to have three broad missions: information, political action, and

education/culture.[12] Public diplomacy is only part of larger arena of statecraft employing the tools of information or communications. This is the arena of strategic communication. Since the disestablishment of the Unites States Information Agency in 1999, U.S. strategic communications with overseas audiences has had no central direction. Public diplomacy is functionally the responsibility of the U.S. Department of State (DOS). DOS has relegated public diplomacy to a lesser priority and effectively marginalized its ability to brandish soft power to influence public opinion and democratic values abroad. The U.S. has allowed the 24-hour news cycle and mass media to not always portray America in the most flattering light. These elements are not controlled and are often biased. The enemy has tapped into these resources and used them effectively without the need for the truth. On the contrary, U.S. actions are highly analyzed and criticized.[13] In an effort to support DOS public diplomacy efforts in regions where there is limited access by DOS personnel, the Defense Department (DOD) has created it own avenue to communicate globally: defense support to public diplomacy (DSPD). According to Joint Pub 3-13, defense support to public diplomacy is "those activities and measures taken by the Department of Defense components to support and facilitate public diplomacy efforts of the United States Government."[14]

DEFENSE SUPPORT TO PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The notion of DSPD is first about communication to the correct audiences, and understanding of the operating environment. While there is no single document defining DSPD at the operational level, much of the literature discusses strategic communication, information operations, Theater Security Cooperation Programs, and humanitarian operations. Montgomery McFate, a cultural anthropologist at the Office of Naval Research,

wrote a recent article in the Joint Forces Quarterly that stressed the need to find the "cultural intelligence" of the desired target area in order to effectively shape the area.[15] Conducting such operations as "building capacity" and providing economic incentives are always tools operational planners use to shape an area in favor of common security interests and other Western values. Other studies, such as GAO-07-904 (U.S. Public Diplomacy: Actions Needed to Improve Strategic Use and Coordination of Research) written in July 2007, suggests the use of the media to counter misinformation about U.S. agendas.[16] However, the media does not bode well to government intervention in its stories or perception. Still, there needs to be interagency cooperation to leverage the full support of diplomatic, information and economic support. Operational leaders should use defense support to public diplomacy applying the principles of operational art to planning. The analysis of centers of gravity and critical factors applicable to counterinsurgency operations (COIN) constitute the overarching analysis to application of defense support to public diplomacy activities. Such things as understanding of the ideological factors underlying the insurgency will highlight critical vulnerabilities in the enemy's beliefs that can be addressed through diplomatic and economic means. This will provide a focal point for public diplomatic efforts of geographic combatant command assets. Unlike purely conventional operations, the factor of time may be much longer to realize desired effects, so patience, endurance and above all U.S. public support are critical requirements. Much of the "force" may be in the form of "soft-power" against support for an ideology. Conducting operations, such as humanitarian operations, can be more effective than the use of lethal force. The traditional principles of war must be carefully applied in conjunction with defense support to public diplomacy in order to change the perception of individuals currently teetering on the notions laid out in violent extremist

ideology. Using information also requires coordination with the information efforts of allies, friends, and former adversaries. Currently, information operations capabilities are not being synchronized between geographic combatant commands and the other government agencies operating in their respective areas of operations.

A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

As previously stated, the destablishment of the USIA in 1999 has created a communication resource void across all aspects of the United States Government. The Department of State does not have the manpower or resources to be the sole provider of the U.S. strategic messages. Because of this shortfall, other government agencies, such as the Defense Department and USAID, have attempted to fill that vacuum with their own messages. Because the IO capabilities are not being synchronized geographic combatant commanders and other government agencies attempted different communication avenues with little to no success.

More than eight years after the dissolution of the USIA, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes, unveiled the first comprehensive national strategy ever developed for public diplomacy in May 2007. The document provided a new strategy that is intended to display a unified strategic framework while at the same time allowing for enough flexibility to meet each government agency's individual needs. The strategy outlines three key objectives to govern America's communication with foreign audiences: it states that the United States should offer a vision of hope and opportunity to the world, should isolate and marginalize violent extremists, and should nurture common interests and values between Americans and foreign publics. In order to achieve this, several

key priorities for public diplomacy programs and activities are established. The priorities are accompanied by concrete and detailed examples of how each can be turned into action.[17]

First, the strategy calls for the expansion of education and exchange programs, with particular emphasis given to reaching youth, women, and other key influencers in society. Here, English language teaching, the use of technology, and public-private partnerships are identified as crucial components for success. Operational leaders have been executing this strategy with much success for many years. The theater security assistance programs such as the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program and the use of Regional Centers for Security Studies have provided education and training opportunities for many foreign military and civilian personnel. However, the strategy calls for this program to expand by focusing on other influential members of foreign societies such as journalists, clerics, and business leaders.

Second, the need to modernize communication techniques is addressed. The plan calls for an increase in the presence of language trained American spokesmen on foreign media outlets. This is seen as a priority not only with television and radio, but also with new technologies such as the internet, web chats, blogs, online videos, and pod casts. The National Strategy also encourages operational leaders to participate more in foreign media interviews and broadcasts in order better clarify U.S. policy decisions and promote U.S. transparency.

Third, the plan emphasizes the leverage that can be raised by concentrating on America's "diplomacy of deeds." Regardless of their opinion towards U.S. policy, foreign publics should know the tremendous impact that Americans are making across the world in areas that people care about most: health, education, and economic opportunity. By expanding and

advertising these accomplishments, we will be able to communicate our values most effectively. Geographic combatant commanders and leaders at all levels have not been very successful at displaying and projecting the humanitarian assistance and other developmental programs that our service men and women conduct on a daily basis to the world stage. Historically, the most successful operations conducted by U.S. forces influencing public opinion have been the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions. However, leaders at all levels can spread the message more effectively about how servicemen and women are taking personal interest in disease control, building of schools, and providing local economic opportunities for the local populace in the countries U.S. forces are operating in. A message about service members teaching local populace skills practiced by ordinary Americans goes a long ways in improving the American image.[18]

In addition to these priorities, the national strategy pays particular attention to the importance of inter-agency coordination, evaluation and measurement, and tools for success. The strategy even calls for the establishment of a focal communications center to coordinate messaging across government agencies on the war on terrorism. This would elevate the problems of geographic combatant commanders with overlapping regions of interest producing divergent messages.

This strategic vision has finally given recognition of the fact that the U.S. government needs to communicate with a unified voice when acting overseas. We have too often been guilty of speaking on behalf of one particular agency or idea while ignoring those alternate (and sometimes conflicting) messages emanating from other parts of the government. Perhaps more importantly, however, this new strategy reflects the increasing role that public diplomacy will likely play in our post-Cold War world.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AT THE GEOGRAPHIC COMBATANT COMMANDS

Despite this clear and direct strategy for the cooperation of public diplomacy, neither the strategy nor its originators, have direct authority over any government agency to ensure its implementation. As a result, the geographic combatant commanders and other operational decision makers still have not raised the level of priority for these activities. During the recent testimonies to the House Senate Armed Services Committees in 2008, only the commander of U.S. SOUTHCOM mentioned refocusing efforts on strategic communication and making it a priority at all levels of command.[19] In his discussion of special operations forces, the commander of U.S. EUCOM briefly mentions that the command's information operations and civil affairs actions have focused on humanitarian activities, with messages designed to erode popular support for violent extremist organizations.[20] None of the remaining geographic combatant commanders mention strategic communication or public diplomacy in their posture statements, though U.S. AFRICOM has made significant steps in improving its communication through its multi-language web site.[21]

Operational commanders must recognize that U.S. messages must be communicated to three major objective populations: violent extremists and their organizations; non-adversary foreign audiences that are sympathetic groups and individuals; and groups and individuals that share sympathy but are unwilling to actually show support for the extremists.

The first group is violent extremists and those who support, or are sympathetic to their cause and cannot be changed. This is the group at which information operations are directed, mainly during shaping and combat operations. The purpose of the information operations are directed against an adversary's decision process.

For the second audience, operational leaders need to clearly define the objectives of public diplomacy to influence the non-adversary foreign audiences that are both sympathetic groups and individuals who may passively support or enable the violent extremist organizations. This audience is where the operational commander should focus public diplomacy efforts to erode the base in which the insurgent ideology exists.

The final audience are those groups and individuals who may share sympathy but are unwilling to actually take action to support or show hospitality to the extremists. Communication with such populations should not use the same military principles as employed against an adversary. Joint Publication 3-13 lists core functions of IO include PSYOPS, Military Deception, OPSEC, Electronic Warfare, and Computer Network Operations.[22] If at all possible, the U.S. should not in any way convey IO offensive principles to friendly or non-adversarial audiences, or risk credibility problems and generating (additional) anti-U.S. sentiment. Thus, there is a need for military planners to understand principles of information operations and ensure that these actions are nested within public diplomacy efforts. By properly employing the information operations tools available to the operational commander, the United States can go a long way in communicating better with our foreign audiences. Whether it is a PSYOP campaign of leaflet drops, well-timed public affairs statements, or local media interviews, operational commanders will be better suited to set the conditions in the area of operations by informing the public of the military's intentions instead of trying to react to the message the enemy is saying about the operation.

RECOMMENDATION

Geographic combatant commanders should draft a theater information strategy concentrating on proactive, influential, and shaping (rather than reactive) efforts to reduce sources of conflict; assistance to nations in their transition to democratic systems; increasing dialogue by building political, economic, military, medical, commercial, social, and educational bridges; development of collaborative approaches to regional problems; international military education and training; and emphasis on the correct role of the military in a democracy, including constructive domestic uses. All elements of the plan should be designed to help achieve political, economic, and military objectives in the area of operations. These plans need to coordinate all the mechanisms of the combatant command staff, military units in the region, U.S. Embassies, and if at all possible, allied representatives. Additionally, all efforts should be made to coordinate the plans with adjacent geographic combatant commands and the U.S. Government.

Geographic combatant commanders should link the State Department's Office of Citizen Exchanges with the International Military Educational and Training (IMET) program. The DOS Citizen Exchanges program "provide[s] foreign participants with the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and understanding so they can better address the challenges facing their countries..."[23] The IMET program "…exposes students to the U.S. professional military establishment and the American way of life, including amongst other things, U.S. regard for democratic values, respect for individual and human rights and belief in the rule of law."[24] These programs are very similar in their aims and could be coordinated by the geographic combatant commanders to allow for not only the military leaders attending the IMET courses, but the civilian leadership or military family members from the area of operations.

As a matter of course, defense support to public diplomacy plans would be integrated into operation, concept, and contingency plans in much the same way as we have incorporated flexible deterrent options. When problems do arise and organizations begin contingency planning, a theater-wide strategic communication supporting plan must be developed and implemented. The battle space needs to be "informationally" prepared to defuse, deter, or contain the conflict. Geographic combatant commanders should request the assistance of organizations such as NATO, Organization of American States, Organization of African States, and the Gulf Countries Council to develop and implement such an information strategy and to accept an increasing role.

Operational leaders can utilize a strong communication strategy to get the message to foreign media and other technologies to "prep the battle space" in order to explain the policies and objectives of their actions. The transparency of U.S. intentions will allow for further understanding by the foreign audiences. However, understanding that the foreign media will have its own agenda will require that public affairs personnel ensure that operational leaders are well prepared for the interviews.

Lastly, from the strategic level all the way down to the tactical level, leaders need improvement in capturing the positive acts of our own Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, other government agencies, and even the citizens of the country themselves. As previously stated, the primary avenues that geographic combatant commanders can utilize to communicate with target audiences are the IO capabilities of PA, DSPD, and Combat Camera. Additionally, operational commanders must make the conscious effort to delegate the release authority of such information down to the lowest levels in order to get better timeliness on the release of effective products. As the old adage states, "a picture is worth a

1000 words". Additionally, commanders should keep mind of how new media uses pictures and images on Youtube and other social networking sites in order to broadcast what is going on in the world. It is essential that the world, as well as regional and U.S. domestic audiences, sees these images of security, collaborative progress, and hope.

While there are strategic, operational, and tactical measures of effectiveness, the operational leaders need to ensure that there are organizational elements to tracking the indicators and providing feedback to information planners at all levels. The measure of effectiveness is the sentiments of the populace, political elites and decision makers; and media. It is very difficult and requires a great deal of time to get an accurate depiction on the effectiveness of an information operations campaign. However, the metrics for capturing this effectiveness can be molded into whatever shape a command needs. The bottom line of the measures of effectiveness is that the votes by the allies, neutrals, adversaries, actions by NGOs, IGOs, shura councils, and other decision making bodies are being constantly watched and adjusted upon. As was previously stated, the approval process for more rational and responsive products needs to be delegated down to the lowest levels to ensure timely responsiveness to the ever changing popular opinion.

CONCLUSION

Strong global communication can no longer take a back seat on the national security agenda. The primary tool available to operational leaders is Defense Support to Public Diplomacy. Public diplomacy is a vital part of winning the war on terror. By understanding the basis of soft power and defense support to public diplomacy, geographic combatant commanders can more effectively coordinate efforts throughout their area of operations.

Additionally, geographic combatant commanders have to ensure that messages and themes are in coordination with the information efforts of allies, friends, and former adversaries. It also requires multi-agency, multi-service, multidisciplinary, and multidimensional integration as well as orchestration and coordination. Operating under one central strategy and theme across the different geographic commands and government agencies will ensure that U.S. policies display images of security, collaborative progress, and hope to the world, as well as regional and U.S. domestic audiences. Until the priority for public diplomacy is elevated throughout the geographic combatant commands and other government agencies, the ability to capture the crucial key "human" terrain will remain marginalized. The next jihadist, suicide bomber, trainee for the national military, or informant will continue to be produced based on the ideas portrayed by the two sides. In the current global environment of rapidly changing and influential information outlets, effective public diplomacy efforts will allow for operational commander to coordinate and adjust their messages in a timely fashion in order to better affect the support of the civil populaces in every corner of the globe.

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